

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for the preparation of beads having a crosslinked inorganic matrix with a size controlled in the millimeter range, which comprises,

pouring a suspension comprising a precursor of the inorganic matrix and an alginate dropwise into a solution of a polyvalent cation salt~~[[,]]~~ ~~to obtain a reaction medium wherein the reaction medium has~~ with a pH of less than 3, to obtain a reaction medium, ~~wherein the reaction medium has a pH of less than 3~~ in which the alginate gels, and

crosslinking the precursor of the inorganic matrix by a sol-gel process.

Claim 2 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the pH is less than 2.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the alginate is an alkali metal alginate.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the beads are maintained in the reaction medium for a time of 1 hour to 24 hours for the gelling of the alginate.

Claim 5 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is an inorganic compound capable of crosslinking by a sol-gel process chosen from inorganic compounds which have hydroxyl groups bonded to a metal when they are in solution.

Claim 6 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in claim 5, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is a compound capable of ~~gelling~~crosslinking according to the polymerization of molecular entities (PME) mechanism.

Claim 7 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is an alkali metal silicate.

Claim 8 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in claim 5, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is a compound capable of ~~gelling~~crosslinking according to the destabilization of colloidal solutions (DCS) mechanism.

Claim 9 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 8, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is an alumina of boehmite type or a colloidal silica.

Claim 10 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is crosslinked by an alkali metal fluoride during a stage following the gelling of the alginate, the polyvalent cation salt used for the gelling of the alginate having a cation other than calcium.

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the crosslinking of the inorganic matrix is carried out while ~~keeping the beads suspended with stirring~~ the reaction mixture for a time of between 6 and 72 hours.

Claim 12 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 8, wherein the precursor of the inorganic matrix is crosslinked under the effect of the pH of the reaction medium during the gelling of the alginate.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): The process as claimed in claim 12, wherein the reaction medium, ~~comprising the beads formed by the gelled alginate and the crosslinked inorganic matrix,~~ is maintained at ambient temperature for a time of between 1 and 24 hours.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein it is carried out at a temperature between 10°C and 60°C.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the polyvalent cation salt used for the gelling of the alginate is chosen from salts for

which the anion is a halide, a nitrate or a sulfate and for which the cation is an alkaline-earth metal, transition metal or noble metal cation.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one additive chosen from pigments, kaolin powder, clays, coloring agents and pore-forming agents is added to the suspension comprising the precursor of the inorganic matrix and the alginate.

Claim 17 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the beads obtained after crosslinking the inorganic matrix are extracted from the reaction medium by filtration.

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the beads separated by filtration are washed with water or with a basic aqueous solution at a $\text{pH} < 8$.

Claim 19 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the beads separated by filtration are subjected to drying in the air, optionally after having been washed with acetone or with alcohol.

Claim 20 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the beads separated from the reaction medium by filtration are dried by lyophilization.

Claim 21 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the beads extracted from the reaction medium by filtration are washed with acetone or with alcohol and are then placed in a solution comprising an alkoxide of a metal diluted in an anhydrous organic solvent.

Claim 22 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 17, wherein the beads separated from the reaction medium by filtration are subjected to calcination at a temperature of between 400°C and 800°C.

Claim 23 (Currently Amended): A material formed of beads suspended in an aqueous medium wherein the beads are obtained by a process as claimed in claim 1, ~~formed of beads suspended in an aqueous medium, wherein the beads~~ have a diameter of 0.5 mm to 6 mm and are comprised of a hydrated matrix of gelled alginate, a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of the polyvalent cation of the salt used as gelling agent.

Claim 24 (Previously Presented): A bead obtained by a process as claimed in claim 19, wherein the bead is comprised of an alginate network, a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide ~~of the cation~~ originating from the agent for gelling ~~the alginate~~ polyvalent cation salt with a pH of less than 3.

Claim 25 (Previously Presented): A bead obtained by a process as claimed in claim 21, wherein the bead is formed of a core comprised of an alginate network, a

crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of the cation originating from the agent for gelling the alginate and of a surface layer of metal oxide or hydroxide.

Claim 26 (Previously Presented): A bead obtained by a process as claimed in claim 22, wherein the bead is comprised of a crosslinked inorganic matrix and a hydroxide of the cation originating from the agent for gelling the alginate, and is porous and is devoid of organic compounds.

Claim 27 (Previously Presented): The bead as claimed in claim 24, wherein it additionally comprises at least one compound chosen from pigments, kaolin powder, clays and coloring agents.

Claim 28 (Previously Presented): The process as claimed in claim 16, wherein the at least one additive comprises an organic coloring agent for cosmetic use.

Claim 29 (Currently Amended): The bead as claimed in claim 24 27, wherein the at least one compound comprises an organic coloring agent for cosmetic use.